



## MAKING OINTMENTS IN THE FINNISH ORAL FOLK POETRY

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Sent his young son to the smithy,  
There to make a healing balsam,  
From the herbs of tender fibre,  
From the healing plants and flowers,  
From the stalks secreting honey,  
From the roots, and leaves, and blossoms.

(Translated by John Martin Crawford, 1888,

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/kveng/index.htm>, 29.3.2007)

The Rune of the Salve starts with these words in the Kalevala (1849) by Elias Lönnrot (1802-1884). When Väinämöinen carves a wooden boat, his axe slips and he receives a deep wound in his knee. He searches for an expert blood-stauncher and finally finds an old man who stops the flow of blood by using magic incantations. Then the salve is prepared and tested, as well as the raw materials before making the salve. There are over 600 runes and magic incantations in the Finnish folk poetry, which tell us about raw materials as honey and hays, or vessels needed for making ointments. A bee is quite often mentioned as a salve maker. When Lemminkäinen's mother has raked the pieces of her son's body out of Tuonela River, she asks the bee "bring mead on your wing/ and bear honey on your cape/ to be ointment for the sick/ to pour on the injuries" (trans. by Keith Bosley, *The Kalevala*, Oxford University Press, 1989). Some of the Kalevala poems are over 2000 years old.